

The Ballarat Naturalist

Volume 25 No.09

October 2025



5th September Guest Speaker Pam Whiteley

Topic *Wildlife Health Victoria and Surveillance*

Pam has been the Wildlife health surveillance coordinator since 2008, a total of 17 years. She is based at Melbourne Veterinary School The University of Melbourne.

These notes are taken from her Information Pamphlets, compiled by Valerie Hocking. .

Introduction

- Wildlife health surveillance is an essential component of One Health, improving understanding of wildlife and ecosystem health and reservoirs of zoonotic and livestock diseases.
- When multiple host species are infected or exposed to environmental contaminants, One Health is a sound and efficient strategic framework.
- Veterinary faculties provide a productive base for wildlife health surveillance.

Pam began by speaking on climate change and its impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, the economy and human health, which are all interdependent. Climate, geology and soil, vegetation and ecosystems are impacted by human actions and habitat loss. Habitat degradation, and fragmentation limit population connections, genetic diversity, fitness and resilience including wildlife disease resistance—Pam went on to give many examples with some graphic illustrations.

In an effort to diagnose causes of disease and death in wildlife the Veterinary School are keen to collect specimens. Dead wildlife are transported to the university for diagnostic investigations that involve input from faculty staff in pathology, microbiology, virology, parasitology, molecular epidemiology and epidemiology. The project also undertakes field inspections and engages in important collaborations with other institutions. Approximately 100 cases are investigated annually with the key cases entered into Wildlife Health Australia's database, feeding into a national surveillance program.

Methods

- Long term monitoring of an ecosystem and wildlife enables us to:
- understand normal, baseline health patterns,
 - detect changed patterns and investigate factors involved (animal

host, environmental, disease agents– infectious and non infectious)
-test for zoonotic infections in wildlife reservoirs: serum,
ectoparasites, swabs etc.

The rest of Pam's address outlined some of the results of their studies and the limitations of the data.

In a follow-up letter, Pam provided the following information:

“Field Naturalist Clubs are very important and contribute to understanding regional wildlife health in Victoria and we wish to partner with you.

We are keen to receive reports of clusters of sick or dead wildlife and reports of unusual wildlife to examine for population health. We need to get fresh, chilled, dead wildlife to Melbourne University Veterinary School (250 Princes Highway, Werribee 9-5 Mon-Fri) for examination. Please contact pamw@unimelb.edu.au / mobile: 0400 119 301. Please also notify DEECA, Dept of Agriculture and Parks Victoria so they are aware of health issues.

Collection- *Avoid contact with sick and dead wildlife, use gloves and collect dead birds like picking up dog's droppings using plastic bags as gloves. Hold your breath and double bag, then label in 3rd bag and chill. Freezing limits bacteriology and histopathology. We cannot help with sick/injured/orphaned wildlife. They need urgent local welfare responses with a vet or wildlife carer. Of particular interest are unusual species (platypus, echidna, koala, bandicoot, potoroo, Gang Gang, black cockies, reptiles, frogs, etc), or clusters of sick or dead wildlife.*

For awareness and advice about what to do re Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI H5N1) arriving in Australia and affecting birds, mammals, etc., Google 'dead wildlife Victoria'. AgVic advises Avoid, Record, Report on 13 61 86 and their online form.

Wildlife Health Australia website has key information on HPAI and fact-sheets on disease in mammals, birds, zoonotic, etc. including state WHA Coordinators.

Visit <https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/>

*Pam welcomes people to contact her about sick or dead wildlife. My best wishes and thanks for including me. I'm happy to talk with other regional FNC and Landcare groups.
Pam Whiteley”*

From the Wildlife Health Australia Website

H5 bird flu Facts

H5 bird flu, also known as *high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b*, is a strain of the avian influenza virus. The virus has been spreading globally since 2021 through the movement of wild birds, with unprecedented impact. H5 bird flu can also affect other animals, and millions of wild animals worldwide have now died due to the virus.

A fact sheet is available on the website

H5 bird flu has not been detected in Australia. However, H5 bird flu may arrive in Australia via wild bird movements year-round, with the annual Spring (August – November) migration of wild shorebirds from the northern hemisphere being the most likely way for H5 bird flu to arrive here.

If you suspect a wild animal may be infected with H5 bird flu

AVOID contact with sick or dead wildlife and their environment.

Observe from a distance and keep pets away.

RECORD what you see, the location the animal was found, and take photos or video if it is safe to do so.

REPORT any unusual sickness or mass mortality events in wildlife via the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.**

Avian influenza is a **nationally notifiable disease** meaning if you suspect an animal is showing signs of the disease, you must report it. *Reporting will alert authorities so they can evaluate the need for testing or other investigation. Even if testing is not undertaken, all reports help inform our understanding of the disease and how to manage it.*



September Field Trip—Long Forest in spring

We met at Merrimu Reservoir Picnic Ground at 10:30am. The forecast top temperature was 17, but here the wind was cool, and beanies and jackets were very much in evidence. I was happy to observe some insects and found out later that one ant was a species I had never seen before, *Camponotus suffusus* ssp. *suffusus*.

We proceeded to the Coimadai Creek Track off Canopus Circuit. Before even reaching the gate, we had seen a Small-leaved Clematis, *Clematis microphylla*, in flower, and our first of the 16 species of saltbushes found in the Long Forest area, the Fragrant Saltbush *Chenopodium parabolicum*. Access to the track is by a stile beside the padlocked gate. Before most of us had tackled the stile, a Parks Victoria vehicle arrived and staff opened the gate, allowing us to walk in easily. They laughed off our suggestion that they should return at the end of our walk to open the gate for us again.

Our first stop was at the park information boards where the shelter was adorned with many patches of Mantidfly eggs, as well as Green Lacewing eggs, spider eggs, and a case moth probably of the genus *Lepidoscia*. Here I found another new-to-me ant species, the Golden-tailed Sugar Ant *Camponotus aeneopilosus*.

From here, our walk was downhill to the intersection with Happy Valley Track then following that track north along the creek a little way. Emily suggested that we walk downhill without too much stopping, then we could spend time on the way back up taking photos and exploring.



Blue finger orchid

Of course, it didn't quite work that way; we spotted some orchids and that was the end of heading down without stopping. When Emily had scouted the site a few days previously, she had found only Dwarf Greenhoods in flower. Luckily, many Blue Finger-orchids *Cyanicula caerulea* and Dusky Fingers *Caladenia fuscata* opened their flowers for us, along with the Dwarf Greenhoods *Pterostylis nana*.

Along the way we found a shiny green and gold leaf beetle of the genus *Calomela*, and a large nymph of the Gum Tree Shield Bug genus *Poecilometis*.— below



Three times during the day I saw butterflies in flight, the first butterflies I had seen this spring. Unfortunately, none came close enough to be photographed. They were mainly white so perhaps were the introduced Cabbage White but may also have been one of the species of Jezebel butterflies which are regularly observed in the Long Forest fluttering from one mistletoe flower to another.

Eucalypts included Red Box and Grey Box, and acacias included Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha* in flower, Round-Leaf Wattle *A. acinacea* in bud and Black Wattle *A. mearnsii*. We found a

Hop Goodenia *Goodenia ovata* unusually growing on a dry ridge rather than in the moister gullies we're used to finding them in. It had been well-chewed, perhaps by wallabies.

Down by the creek there was an enormous wombat burrow. Here we saw Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, and plants including Austral Bugle *Ajuga australis*, (below) Sweet Hounds-tongue *Hackelia suaveolens*, Pink Purslane *Calandrinia calyptrata*, Grey Tussock-grass *Poa sieberiana* and unfortunately some Serrated Tussock *Nassella trichotoma*.



Trees included Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* and Candlebark *E. rubida*, and a Blue Box *E. baueriana* hosting Box Mistletoe *Amyema miquelii*.

While the walk down the hill had been mostly easy going, the walk back up in bright sunshine took a little more effort. At the lowest point down near the creek the elevation was 124m. The highest point on the return was 186m. I took an occasional stop to photograph interesting lichen and plants I missed on the way down, but there was no time to waste; it was past time for lunch.

We ate lunch near the carpark at the start of Happy Valley Track. Right by the picnic table was an arid-zone plant, Turkeybush *Eremophila deserti* in flower.

Our afternoon walk followed the Happy Valley Track past the dam. We saw more of the same orchid species, and at one point stopped to

observe a mixed flock of small birds foraging through the trees and undergrowth. With the help of binoculars and Roger's bird call knowledge, a Brown-headed Honeyeater, Weebill, White-naped Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Grey Shrike-thrush, and a Varied Sittella were identified. Other birds seen or heard on the day included Crimson Rosella, Eastern Yellow Robin, Spotted Pardalote, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler and a delightful pair of Rose Robins.



Yellow Robin
(*Eopsaltria
australis*)

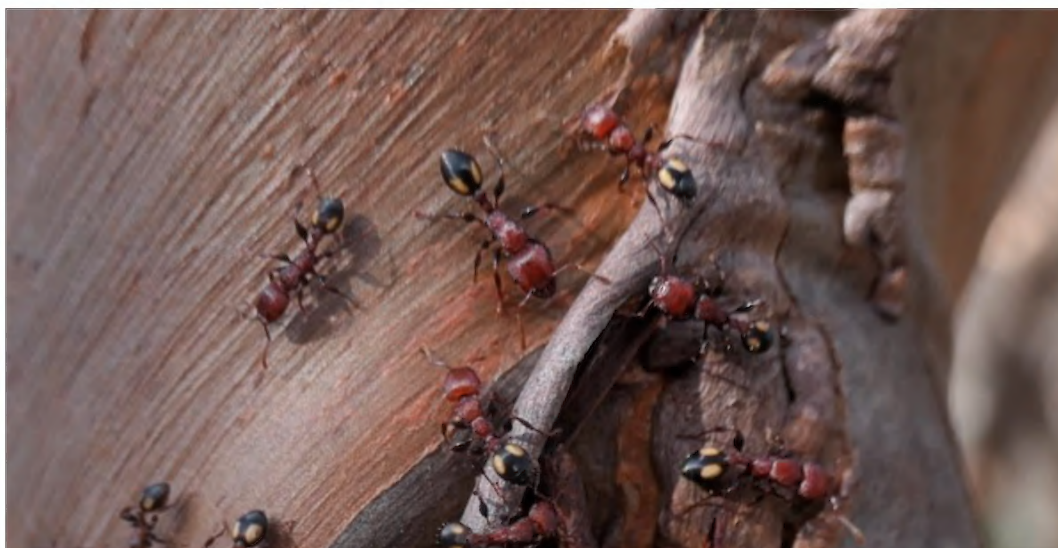


By the dam, Graeme found empty shells of the Billabong Mussel, *Velesunio ambiguus*.

Plants observed in the afternoon included Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, Heath Spyridium *Spyridium eriocephalum*, Shiny Cassinia *Cassinia longifolia*, Dodder laurel and the endangered Forked Rice-flower *Pimelea hewardiana*.—below



Our last interesting insect find of the day was a nest of Spotted Musclemán Tree Ants, *Podomyrma adelaidae*.—below



It was a lovely spring day, and interesting to compare with our previous autumn visit to Long Forest in March 2024. All the iNaturalist observations for both trips can be found via links in the relevant journal posts on our FNCB iNaturalist project:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/fncb-inaturalist>

Many thanks to Emily for her time spent preparing for the field trip, and for leading us on the day.

Vireya Jacquard.

Images Vireya J, Angela A & Val H

Claire delighted us all with a treasured family article that was discovered with much excitement by her 18-year old granddaughter, Kate. The piece was written in 1988 by Claire's children when they were 10 years old, recalling a memorable excursion to what was then known as Mt.Beckwith (now Mt. Beckworth).

Excursion - 6th November 1988 to Mt Beckwith

On Sunday 6th November about thirty of our members travelled to Mt. Beckwith for the afternoon and evening. It was a perfect day. We were so lucky because the day before was cool and the next day was that horrible, dreadfully windy Monday. Our day was calm and warm. We hoped to find lots of open sun orchids but we didn't - we just found odd ones - salmon and blue ones. Our first stop was to look at a large patch of dainty fairies aprons and some very tiny plants. The fairies aprons were purple and they made a lovely bright patch in some open, damp ground. Our next stop was to look at some Spur Velleias. These yellow flowers had a spur on the underneath of each flower which is how they got their name. They were interesting. We continued on and parked near a dam for a drink under shady trees before setting off on our main walk. There were hundreds and hundreds of chocolate lilies. There were so many that the bush looked mauve and they smelt nice too. We liked setting off the grass trigger plants and we were happy to find a couple of blue stars hiding under a bush. Milkmaids were growing well and the rabbit ears orchids were interesting to examine with a magnifying glass. There were a few purple beard orchids which are soft to pat and Mrs Hocking, Carl, Caroline, David and us two saw three lovely green comb spider orchids. We marked the track with a few arrows, but most of the adults still missed them. There were also golden moths, wax lip orchids, common flat-peas, yam daisies, sun dews, golden everlastings and onion orchids. The daphne heath bushes smelt nice and were in full flower and fairly common. We saw lots of blue pincushions not quite flowering yet. Mr Thomas said that when they are flowering that will mean that Spring is over. One of the best things we saw was some parent birds sitting on a nest just above the track. They changed shifts while we watched. They were white-bellied cuckoo shrikes (used to be called little cuckoo shrikes). We also saw some yellow robins feeding their young. After we had returned to our cars some people went on to another water hole to have their tea and watch the birds come in to drink but we had to go home. It was a lovely day and we enjoyed it very much.

Allison and Heather Dalman.

**Excerpts from the FNCB Club Meeting Minutes held
September 5th, 2025 at 7.30 pm.**

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: Club President Neville Oddie welcomed 21 members and three visitors attending the meeting in person and another five members attending via Zoom .

Apologies: Andrew Grant, Carol Hall, Alasdair Wardle, Sue Grey-Smith, Drew Billingham and Mark Moravec.

Guest Speaker: Pam Whiteley from the University of Melbourne's Veterinary School presented a visually confronting talk on "Wildlife Health Surveillance- Research, monitoring, likely impacts and mitigation measures for challenges like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza".

Business Arising from Previous Club Meeting on August 1, 2025

The Club submission calling for the urgent legislation of Central West Parks as per the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's recommendations (2019) was sent to the Premier Jacinta Allan, Ripon MP Martha Haylett and the Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos. Only automatic responses so far received. Emily also sent the document to Gayle Osborne of Wombat Forestcare and the Victorian National Parks Association for their interest, receiving thanks for our efforts from them. Emily informed members that Gayle was able to tell us that legislation is due to come before Parliament in September so we will keep an eye out for that. Neville acknowledged club members who put the submission together.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

- Discuss the (non)response received this week from the State Government to the Club's follow-up letter to again request the permanent, immediate end to recreational duck-hunting in Victoria.
- Neville reported that although a response was received from the department, it was disappointing that it failed to address any of the specific concerns raised in the club's letter. He invited members to share their views on the contents of the reply. The key question now is whether the club should consider escalating the issue further or explore the possibility of aligning with other like-minded organisations to strengthen our advocacy. Neville expressed the view that we should actively look for avenues to escalate the matter in a strategic and constructive manner.
- Shirley queried whether club members could email certain parliamentarians regarding the issue. Neville encouraged personal, wider action given the importance of the issue.

- Shirley queried whether the contact details of relevant parliamentarians could be included in the meeting minutes to assist members who wish to send emails. Emily reminded members that the club’s submission letter and the government’s response—both of which included the appropriate contact details—had already been circulated to all members.

Important Notice: Change of venue for 2025 Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture on Friday 7th Nov. It is to be held at the Ballarat North Community Centre, 702 Walker St, Ballarat North. There was an issue with the usual room not being available, which resulted in the investigation of an alternative. The above venue has now been confirmed. Members will be reminded about the new location closer to the date. This will be a very special occasion indeed as our beloved member, Roger Thomas, will be a guest speaker on the night – not to be missed!

Just in, FNCB Membership Application from Stuart Porteous. Neville asked Stuart to give a quick outline of his primary interest in natural history, which Stuart eloquently did. Consequently, the following motion was made:

Motion: That Stuart Porteous be accepted as a member of the FNCB. -approved

Reports:

Treasurer's Report:

Opening bal. as at August 1, 2025: \$17,958.89
Income \$2,996.00
Expenses: \$198.00
Closing bal.: \$20,756.89

Treasurer’s DBB Income/Expenses Report

Total Income: \$11,076.00 Total Expenses: \$6,118.75
Current Profit: \$4,957.25

SEANA Spring Camp Income/ Expenses Report

Total Income: \$8,879.00 Total Expenses: \$400.00
Current Position: \$8,479.00

Kathy also reported on a reimbursement to be paid to Graham Lunt for two subscriptions; Zoom and WordPress.

Motion: That the Treasurer’s Reports be accepted & tabled invoices be approved for payment. - approved

SEANA Spring Camp 2025 Update:

Kathy provided a brief update, noting that 87 participants have registered so far, with most also booked for the Friday and Saturday night dinners. Numbers are approaching the cap of 100 for excursion participation and are nearing 90 for the dinners.

Registrations are progressing well, and there is still availability for those who wish to attend the dinners.

The Second Circular is nearly complete and will be sent to all registered participants shortly. It will include a summary of the excursions to give attendees a preview. On Friday afternoon, during registration, participants will be able to sign up for their chosen excursions. Once the Circular has been distributed, the committee will shift focus to finalising other event logistics, including supper catering, allocating volunteer roles, and preparing a running sheet for the evening events. Two guest speakers have been confirmed—one for Friday and one for Saturday evening. Planning will ensure these sessions run smoothly. Neville will also offer a brief address during the event.

The SEANA sub-committee continues to meet regularly to manage planning and coordination.

Neville emphasised that a significant number of volunteers will be needed across the event days to ensure everything runs smoothly. Specific tasks will be identified at the next meeting, and members will be asked to commit to roles. All members are encouraged to consider how they can assist.

General Business

Saturday 6th September field trip, 9.30am–4.30pm: “Long Forest in Spring” to be led by Emily Noble. Sadly, due to health reasons, our co leader Marilyn Hewish is unable to attend.

Vireya has kindly volunteered to write-up this field trip for the newsletter.

FNCB webpage on Victorian Environment Friends Network website is now live. Sheree was warmly thanked and congratulated with a round of applause for gathering all of the information and photos and getting it uploaded successfully.

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

Claire: Claire brought a copy of The Pyrenees Advocate (newspaper) to share with the club as it relates to Elizabeth and Denis Thurgood who were very active members for a long time. She welcomed anyone who would like to have a look to please do so.

Claire also delighted us all with a treasured family article that was discovered with much excitement by her 18-year old granddaughter, Kate. The piece was written in 1988 by Claire's children when they were 10 years old, recalling a memorable excursion to what was then known as Mt. Beckwith (now Mt. Beckworth). The story offered a charming glimpse into the day, describing the weather, the thrill of discovery, and the beauty of the natural surroundings. The children wrote about spotting hundreds of Chocolate Lilies, along with Blue Stars, Milkmaids, Fairy's Aprons, yellow Spur Velleias, and various orchids, including Rabbit-ears and Purplish Beard-orchids. A word of wisdom from "Mr Thomas" was mentioned in the article about the presence of Blue Pincushions indicating the beginning of summer. Peter D commented on the fascinating range of flowers mentioned in the article, particularly as he has not seen some of them in this location of late.

Roger: after his report last month about the delayed flowering of local wattles and the introduced Cootamundra Wattle, he was happy to say that they are now coming into flower. He also saw his first flowering Common Hovea *H. heterophylla* last week, also later than usual.

Neville: Reported with much delight that his Tree Violets are now developing flower buds very rapidly.

Stuart reported:

(1) The Macarthur St PS library is available for hire at a rate of \$22 per hour, if we are looking for a venue. It is available in the evenings and on weekends.

(2) Invited club members to peruse and/or borrow books he brought along about indigenous wisdom and knowledge and ecology. To keep track of loans, Stuart will take a photo of each member with the book they borrow as a simple record.

Peter D: Masked Lapwings are still diligently sitting on their eggs on our gravel nature strip in Miner's Rest. It's still terrifying going to the letter box!

Val: Val observed a pair of lapwings nesting for the second year in a row on the roof of her neighbour's carport, which she can see clearly from her property in Ballarat East. Last year, the pair successfully hatched four chicks, but the young birds quickly left the area. This year, with the yard now enclosed, Val was able to observe the lapwings more closely over a two-month period. She noted their

regular comings and goings until one day, after some noticeable noise and activity, she discovered that four chicks had hatched. Unfortunately, within two days, two of the chicks had disappeared under unknown circumstances. Not long after, a third chick also vanished. About a week later, the remaining bird and its parents were gone. Val isn't sure what happened to the final chick. A couple of days after the family's departure, she spotted two lapwings back on the roof. They continued to visit intermittently for a short time, although they haven't been seen in the past few days. Val also noted that the pair nested earlier this year than they did last year, an observation supported by Claire.

Emily reported taking a quick look to see if any Blue Fingers orchids were flowering and was pleased to find some in bloom along Snowgum Road in Dereel. She also observed Dwarf Greenhoods in the area. While at Clarksdale, she heard the first Fan-tailed Cuckoo for the season a week ago. She also noted that a Powerful Owl continues to call every night. Emily made several attempts to get closer to record the call, managing to capture a few recordings from different distances. At one point, the owl took off in complete silence—a moment she described as both awesome and moving. She remarked how lovely it is to have the Powerful Owl present in the area once again.

Emily shared that she will be giving a presentation next week in Clunes as part of the Booktown on Sunday monthly talk series. She has been invited to speak about the “Discovering Ballarat’s Bushland” book along with local reserves, flora, fauna and trails. In preparation, she visited several sites in the Clunes and Lexton area. Whilst at the Lexton Streamside Reserve she could hear a variety of bird calls, and saw Restless Flycatchers, Brown Treecreepers, Dusky Woodswallows and other beautiful species.

At Talbot Reservoir, she observed a male Musk Duck and two females hanging around together. Emily recalled how the male began an energetic bathing display of mad flapping, with the two females creating some distance from him in response. The next minute, the male executed a huge slap on the water with his tail, which caught the attention of the females momentarily, before they made a hasty exit. Emily described it as a wonderful and slightly comical display of the male trying to impress the females—though it appeared his efforts were unsuccessful this time around.

Neville: Neville shared highlights from a recent trip he and Kate

took to Tonga, where they had the extraordinary opportunity to spend four days swimming with Humpback Whales. He described the experience as truly remarkable. Whilst Neville chose not to enter the water—due to the requirement to sign a declaration confirming the ability to swim 200 metres in open ocean—he thoroughly enjoyed observing the experience from the boat. For those who did swim, including Kate and her ten-year old grand-daughter, the encounters were based on waiting for the whales to approach. The emphasis was on passive interaction, allowing the animals to decide whether to engage. Neville noted how curious and interactive the whales were. One particularly special moment occurred when Kate came face to face with a whale—its eye just a foot away from hers—an unforgettable experience. He also described watching two male whales playfully interacting with the swimmers, a fascinating display of behaviour that added to the wonder of the trip.

Next Meeting: “Six Peaks Speak” to be presented by Barry Golding. Friday 3rd October 2025, or via Zoom if you prefer.
Meeting closed at 9.05 pm followed by supper

Ballarat SEANA 17-19th Oct countdown!
We have around 88 registrations.
We are looking for donations of biscuits and slices for Friday afternoon tea and Supper. If you can assist, please contact Val Hocking. They should be delivered to Pax Hill at 3 pm on 17th Oct or given to Val prior .Thanks.
Can Friday volunteers arrive at Pax Hill at 3 pm to set up before visitors come from 4 pm please.
After the weekend, can Facilitators write down a few highlights of their excursion to add to the SEANA website and our newsletter?

Our next club meeting’s topic is “Six Peaks Speak” to be presented by Barry Golding. on Friday 3rd October 2025, 7.30pm in person at the Federation University building at the corner of Gillies St & Gregory St, Wendouree or via Zoom if you prefer.

Please consider volunteering to write-up this presentation for the newsletter. (contact Emily to volunteer).

There will be no first weekend of October Field Trip
-So we can continue to plan and prepare for Ballarat SEANA

Meetings and Excursions

Fri 3 Oct Barry Golding *Six Peaks Speak*
No 1st weekend Field Trip

Future events

17 to 19 Oct Ballarat SEANA

24 to 27 Oct Great Southern BioBlitz

Volunteers are needed to write up these events for our newsletter please.

Tues 28 Oct Next Committee meeting at 7.30 pm on Zoom

Fri 7 Nov Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture: Roger Thomas
Nature Notes Retrospective

Venue Ballarat North Community Centre 702 Walker St
Ballarat North

Sun 9 Nov Clunes Block and small reserves, Leader: Roger Thomas

**Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at
7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of
Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),**

Committee:

President	Neville Oddie
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
Committee	Andy Arnold
	Val Hocking
	Sheree Cartledge
	Max Thompson
	Alasdair Wardle
	Sue Grey-Smith

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Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.

Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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